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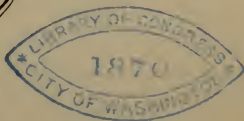
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EASTERTIDE SERMONS

PREACHED BEFORE THE UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE
ON FOUR SUNDAYS AFTER EASTER, 1866

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DEAN OF CANTERBURY



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I.

First Sunday after Easter.

THE FACT OF THE RESURRECTION.

*“ Their words seemed to them
as idle tales, and they be-
lieved them not.”—LUKE
xxiv. 11.*

*“ This Jesus hath God raised
up, whereof we all are wit-
nesses.”—ACTS ii. 32.*

THE words spoken of in the former of these texts were of no common character. They formed, it is true, the report of the women who had returned from the sepulchre of the Lord, and this

report might be regarded as tinged with mental excitement, and with feminine credulity. Yet the import of the words themselves deserved more consideration than that they should be treated as idle tales. The tidings, that the Lord was risen, purported to have been received from two men in shining garments, who had called to remembrance how He Himself had said, while He was yet in Galilee, that He should be crucified, and rise again the third day. Now the disciples had heard these words from the lips of Jesus: and if they were disposed to treat lightly the calling of them to remembrance, it may serve to show to what an extent their faith in Him as the Christ had been shaken. It would

appear, that the frame of mind indicated by one of them this same day, was common to them all: "We trusted it had been He which should have redeemed Israel." Their past following of Jesus must have seemed to them a mistake, of which they were now ashamed. We know how it is with ourselves, when some long-cherished scheme, wrought out with sanguine expectation, has been broken in upon by stern reality, and has passed out of the region of our earnest thoughts. What convinced us before, convinces no longer now. The sunlight colours have faded away; the combinations of words which called up enthusiasm have lost their power; we try to silence self-reproach in forgetfulness,

and count ourselves happy if other men betray not their knowledge how deeply we stood committed. Even so had the dread realities of the cross and the sepulchre broken down the fair fabric of the disciples' hopes. What would they not now give never to have made the sad admission, "We believe and are sure that Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God!" How would they wish to conceal from themselves that they had once spoken the words! All His sayings, all His deeds of power—better bury them in His grave, and let the mysteries which must surround them rest unmoved; all that is now uppermost in their minds is, the bitter confession that they had been deceived, and the deter-

mination to return to their common life, made sadder and wiser.

We can hardly conceive that had the cross and the sepulchre been the end of the course of Jesus, His followers would have held together many months. It was possible, and has not been without example in analogous cases, that the more ardent among them might have waited long for Him to rise again, or to come from heaven; and that some, like baffled interpreters of prophecy, might have shifted on the fulfilment of His words from each disappointment to another and another future chance. But of these resources of deferred hope we do not find any even anticipatory indication. The rumours of the resurrection

were idle tales ; the words of promise on which they rested, were idle words. He, who had uttered them, though His memory might still be fondly cherished, had been proved, by the sternest of all proofs, to have been at least weak and self-deceived. Their confidence was utterly gone ; their hearts had fainted ; their spirits were prostrate.

That such men should knit up again their ravelled and scattered expectations ; that these disciples, being what we know them to have been, should have recovered heart, as the narrative tells us, and as the world's history shows us they did, is simply inconceivable, supposing that nothing more happened after the deposition in the tomb. We cannot imagine

them, crushed, disappointed, deceived men, standing up before the victorious enemies of their disgraced Master, and proclaiming Him a Prince and a Saviour. Mere strength of love for Him would not suffice for this. They had all declared themselves ready to go with Him to prison and to death, and had failed and fled away in the hour of His trial. That which they would not do when He was present and suffering before their eyes, would they be likely to do, now that He was dead, and fading out of their memories day by day? What they dared not face when they were still buoyed up with hopes that He might achieve supernatural victory, were they likely to stand against, now that

defeat had branded Him an impostor and a criminal? Can men like these, without any intervening change of circumstances, persuade themselves in good faith to proclaim Him as the Son of God? It surely is not in human nature to operate on itself such a change, as we must suppose to have passed upon them before this could be the case. And if it be said that they counselled together, and put before the world the concerted fiction of His resurrection, then is the matter, if possible, still more difficult to conceive. Up to the very moment of His betrayal, their expectations had all tended one way,—to the establishment of an outward earthly kingdom, in which they were to reign as His

assessors. Those expectations are baffled ; and, according to this hypothesis, in the midst of the bewilderment of their disappointment, they come forward, asserting facts to have happened to Him of a nature far surpassing all that they had ever conceived before, and preaching a kingdom, the very mention of the character of which would before have been to them gall and bitterness. It were indeed a strange way of dishonestly conspiring on behalf of their Master and themselves, to change ambition into self-denial, proud hopes into the loss of all things, the carnal into the spiritual.

Against these insufficient solutions, let us set the facts of the history. At one great feast of the Jews, when Jerusalem

was crowded with strangers from all parts, Jesus of Nazareth was crucified, and the hopes of His followers were crushed. At the next great festival, six weeks after, we find those same followers standing together in a body, with one who had denied Jesus in the hour of His trial acting as their spokesman, and proclaiming, as in the second of my texts, "This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses." We find them maintaining this in spite of prohibitions, in spite of stripes, in spite of threatenings. They say they cannot but speak the things which they have seen and heard. The presence of the council which had condemned their Master does not deter them from thus testifying of Him. The very

servants of the high priest terrified Peter before ; but the high priest himself, and the assembled Sanhedrim, have no terrors for him now.

How are we to account for these things, my brethren ? Here are cowards become brave men ; disowners of a persecuted Friend when He was in danger, become His witnesses and upholders now that He is crushed beneath contempt. And this they carry on not one nor two years, not against threats and stripes only, but through long lives spent in this testimony, and even unto death, sealing their witness with their blood.

These last words may perhaps remind you of a well-known argument regarding one portion of Christian evidence. But

I am not at present on common ground with that argument. What I am aiming at is, not the conclusion that credit is due to them as honest men, but the supplying of something between their two recorded states of mind, which shall reconcile the change with probability, and make the whole into a connected history.

And I submit to you, my brethren, that there is one way, and but one way, of accounting for this change. And that one way is, that the Resurrection really took place, as we are told it did. I submit to you that, unless Jesus actually rose from the dead, the history of Christianity would have been impossible ; that could not have happened which has hap-

pened, and the results of which we see at this day. Considering the story of the life and death of Jesus, its progress from pretension to defeat, from popularity to rejection, from glory to shame,—the only solution of the question, How comes it that there is a Christian in the world at the present day, is, that “we are witnesses of His resurrection.”

And as regards the change which came upon the disciples, this does resolve all its circumstances, easily and naturally. As we have seen, their hearts and hopes had died within them. The past had been a deplorable mistake. Each one, we may well imagine, was beginning to form his plan, how best to bear his bitter disappointment, and they were scheming

how with least public notice to return to Galilee, and to fall back into the common life of the Jews around them :—when lo, there arises the strange rumour, that He that was dead is alive again. At first it is treated as an idle tale. But one and then another is not content without a visit to the sepulchre. There some of them see, and believe. The Scripture, and the Lord's own often repeated words, are carried for the first time into their hearts. And now messages of plainer import begin to thicken around them. The Lord has been seen—seen and heard by one and another—not an empty apparition, but the well-known form and voice of Him who had been taken from them. And upon this,

strange revulsions of feeling pass through their minds. Half believing, half doubting, the little band collect together to await what may happen. More and more certain, as the day wears on, come the repeated tidings. Again and again, we may well believe, the evidence of His appearance is given to eager inquirers. Some, who would not believe before, cannot hear too often now. One at least whom we know of, remains wholly incredulous, and refuses to entertain the thought, nay, even to join the assembling of themselves together. Meanwhile the risen Saviour has been seen by one whose word carries general conviction: "The Lord is risen indeed, and hath appeared unto Simon."

Such is the joyful news which is passing from mouth to mouth, as the shades of evening fall around them, when two of their number arrive, eager with fresh and certain intelligence. A traveller had walked with them by the way, and had discoursed of their broken hopes ; had reproached them with unbelief of the prophets, and in words which made their hearts glow within them, set forth what Christ ought to have suffered, and to enter into His glory. And when at their request He went with them into their lodging, the stranger took bread, and blessed and brake as He had been wont to do : and behold, it was the Lord. The tale had hardly been told, when the risen one Himself stood in the midst of them,

seen and heard by all. "Peace be with you," are His solemn words of greeting: "peace upon your troubled spirits; the peace of blessed assurance and tranquil certainty, after the fierce storm which had shattered your hopes." "Then," adds the beloved disciple, in his majestic simplicity,—“then were the disciples glad when they saw the Lord.”

What power is there, my brethren, in these few words! From what grief to what exultation do they take us! From what defeat to what triumph! There have been many strange days in this world's history, but there was never a day so strange as this one of the Resurrection, because never one that resembled it in that which had happened. Only

that once has the human spirit thus been touched ; only once transported from so great a sorrow to so great a joy. It is a day much to be remembered, when a beloved life has been hanging in doubt, and the crisis passes, and sleep succeeds to fever, and thankfulness to harassing anxiety. It was a day to be remembered, when one was reading that sentence of death in the forum at Mytilene, and the ship of mercy came in, and wailing was turned into mirth.* It was a day of light and gladness, when Lazarus came back from his tomb, and the sisters' eyes once more rested on the form they had never again hoped to see. But none of those days was like this one. For no such

* See Thucydides, iii. 49.

venture had ever been cast on one life before. It was not love, it was not admiration, it was not trust, as we use these words between man and man: God had looked forth in the midst of them; God had been manifest in the flesh; a voice had sounded from heaven; one had gone in and out among them who had gathered all thoughts and all hopes upon Himself, and lifted them above themselves, and above man, and above the world, into other regions of love, and trust, and wonder, than man with man ever dwells in. And when that life sank down, and that adorable Form was marred, —great in proportion, great beyond human measure was their woe; heaven itself was blotted, and darkness had

fallen upon the earth ; because no face looked on them as that Face, no voice spoke as that Voice ; and all was void and silent. And now what has risen up in that void—what sound has broken that silence ? No human comforter—no voice of empty admonition, or fruitless persuasion. As the loss had been, so is the gain ; as the sorrow, so the joy. It is He Himself : it is not the sorrow healed,—not the past made up for ; no, it is infinitely more than all this. A new order of things has begun, a new life has sprung up ; His resurrection is also their resurrection ; they are not comforted mourners, but they are new-born fellow-workers ; the harvest which seemed to have been but an heap in the day

of desperate sorrow, is become precious seed, for another and an endless sowing.

And with joy comes responsibility. We do not, at this distance of time, and with our long-accustomed handling of Christian evidence, feel one-half of that which is implied in the Acts of the Apostles and in the writings of St. John by that word "witness,"—"the bearing of witness." But we too know something of the great and sudden investiture of responsibility, how it solemnizes men, how it strengthens men, how it transforms men. Look at the stripling left by the dread stroke of bereavement, at the head of an orphan family. See him crushed by the snapping of his love, left guideless, counselless, prostrate in his

tears, needing support as he looks into the closing grave. But see him again, rising with unwonted strength, endowed with faculties unsuspected before, having at once put on the balanced wisdom of manhood, having changed passion for deliberation, negligence for watchfulness, no repute, or ill repute, for good fame daily increasing, and all deserved. And some such change, but greater, because all life and all thoughts were involved in it, passed on these men from that day forward. "They could not but speak of those things which they had seen and heard." This testimony of witnessed fact had become a necessity of their lives ; they went about invested with its responsibility. Before few, before many,

before small and great, captains and prefects, priests and princes, they gave their witness of the Resurrection.

And with joy and responsibility came also strength. In proportion to the greatness of the event, in proportion to the vastness of the change, in proportion to the working of that Spirit, who, granting to each man severally as He will, yet grants not without preparation, grants not out of measure with circumstances,—in these proportions was their testimony given with power, so that it bore down all opposition. Between Peter disclaiming Jesus, Peter weeping bitterly for his faithlessness, Peter returning from the sepulchre, wondering in himself, and Peter standing before the Council and pro-

claiming that there is none other name given under heaven among men whereby we must be saved, there needs no link supplied, if this joy gave responsibility, and strength followed : but otherwise I see not how the weakness and the power are to belong to the same : how the same man is to utter in a few short days some of the weakest and basest, and also some of the boldest and grandest words in the world's history.

And thus, my brethren, the void left by disappointment was filled up by His form who had taught them, and led them, and loved them, and made to them great and precious promises of future glory. But when we say this, we are not perhaps aware how much our words imply. What,

for example, was our Lord's death to them before ? That which we have seen it to be : even defeat, disgrace and shame. What is it now ? Simply the most glorious thing which could occupy the thought or the affections. He is risen as He had said. Then He had power all the while—power over His enemies, power over death ; then every smart of the scourge, every fainting step up that *Via dolorosa*, every pang on the cruel cross, was His own voluntary act ; then is it strictly true, not that, in the ordinary sense, He gave up the ghost, but that He delivered up His spirit, dying as none else have died—having power to lay down His life, as He had also power to take it again. And thus His crown of thorns has be-

come a diadem of victory ; thus the whole character of that eventful day is changed—its memory has passed from the side of deprivation and shame, to the side of beauty and glory. And yet again, What was our Lord Himself to them before ? Doubtless, a dearly loved friend whom they could never forget ; a master who had long led them. And what are the sayings and acts of such dear friends when death has taken them from us ? Things altogether of the past : fading, or sometimes unfading memories, but still memories. They may have been solemn injunctions which were to bring forth fruit in the future. Still, their root is in the past ; they are bound to the dying look of one now no more with us, and the

tone of a voice which we have long ceased to hear. But far other has our Lord become to them, and have His sayings and acts become to them. Now this is of immense importance as regards their remembrance and reproduction of the words and deeds of His life. He is not a friend, a master, departed, and taken from them; He and His words are not things of the past: He is restored to them, not as belonging to the present, but to the future. All that He said, all that He did while He was with them, is not only dear to memory, but has become a seed of hope, a source of life, a warrant for action, a safeguard in suffering. And He himself is not "He who should have redeemed Israel," but the Father of the age to

come, the ever-present, and also the ever looked-for.

And again, it seems to me that thus much, and no less than this, is a postulate required for the acknowledged facts of the disciples' conduct and writings regarding our Lord. We all know the mighty difference made in the power and grasp of memory, by a change having come over any certain period that is past, when a particular space of time, from having been regarded as not worth remembering, has been shown to have been important, and its recollection to be pregnant with solemn consequences. We have all known what it is to sit down and look back over a certain number of days or hours, catching at the floating threads of

suggestion, and from them following up words and acts that had seemed for ever gone from us. And though we believe that the holy Apostles were specially enabled by the Spirit of Truth to set down what Jesus had said and done, yet we are no less convinced that whatever is received must be according to the mode of the receiver ; and we know this to have been so much the case with them, that while three of them have given us reports of our Lord's life and words mainly the same, with certain characteristic differences, the fourth has composed a representation of it so entirely his own, that unbelievers have even denied its compatibility with them. May we not then suppose that the Spirit's help came to them mainly by

means of, and as intensifying, this resurrection of the memory of Him and His words, brought about by His altered place in their thoughts, consequent on the fact of His own Resurrection?

And thus, my brethren, it is that, while we search in vain for any explanation of their conduct and of the subsequent history of Christianity on the hypothesis of His having remained in the tomb, the simple belief of the facts as the Gospels relate them to us, easily and entirely accounts for all that happened then—for all that has happened since.

The rumour was to them as an idle tale. And so it would ever have remained, if indeed it had been remembered at all,

unless Jesus had risen : nothing but the fact believed because seen, could have made them proclaim themselves its witnesses : could have continued that testimony down to this distant day : could have assembled us, and the great Christian multitude of all nations kindreds and tongues, on this the weekly festival, in this the triumphant season, of the Resurrection of the Lord.

II.

Second Sunday after Easter.

THE GREAT SHEPHERD.

*“The God of peace, that brought
again from the dead our
Lord Jesus, that great
Shepherd of the sheep.”—*

HEB. xiii. 20.

IN these words, we have the main theme of the Easter season bound on to the special subject of this one of its Sundays. To-day's Gospel brings before us our Blessed Lord's description of Himself as the Good Shepherd: and in

the Epistle we are reminded that we were as sheep going astray, but are now returned to the Shepherd and Bishop of our souls. In parts of Western Christendom, the day is named the "Sunday of the Good Shepherd." The Writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews, in concluding with a solemn prayer for his readers, joins, in my text, the resurrection of the Lord with His pastoral office. So that we may be sure the Church had a purpose, in introducing Him to us as the Shepherd of our souls, on this first Sunday after the eight days' festival of the Resurrection.

No similitude was so obvious, as applying to the Redeemer and His Church, —none was so ancient. In the primitive

days of the earth and of man, the first keeper of sheep had fallen down slain in the midst of his flock. The whole history of the patriarchs was associated with pastoral life. "Thy servants are shepherds," was the confession of the sons of Jacob to the Egyptian king, who hated the name. Their descendants had been led through the wilderness by one who had for forty years fed his flock in that very desert of Sinai : led, as we had it in the Psalms of this morning, "like sheep by the hand of Moses and Aaron." The poet-king, the central figure in the sacred history, had tended his father's sheep on the rocky heights of Bethlehem, and there had sung those sweet strains by which Jehovah, as the Shepherd, had

been for ever borne into the praises of Israel. And in the prophets, God had taken up the same strain, and swelled it onward into tones of reproach and threatening, till it rang shrill through the ears of Israel in denunciation of false shepherds, and assertion of Himself as the true searcher out and leader of His flock. So that when He came, in whom all types centred, and all prophecy was fulfilled, none need be surprised at His taking unto Himself the great similitude in all its fulness of meaning—at His standing and proclaiming, “I am the Good Shepherd;” at His saying of His death of love, “The Good Shepherd layeth down his life for the sheep;” at His designating that night

of terror by the prophetic words, "I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered;" and His own act after His resurrection, by the pastoral promise, "After that I am risen I will go before you into Galilee." None need wonder that the threefold terms of reinstatement of the penitent Apostle should speak of tending my sheep and feeding my lambs; nor that the farewell address of Paul at Miletus should put on the same form; nor that Peter should exhort the elders to feed the flock of God which was among them, in expectation of the day when the chief Shepherd should appear.

Only in the closing apocalyptic visions, anticipating the day when the mediatorial course shall have past, do we find

this character apparently laid aside or transferred: there our Blessed Lord is the Lamb as it had been slain, and He that sitteth on the throne is the Shepherd, guiding His flock, and leading them to the fountains of the water of life.

It is to this office of our risen Lord that I would now direct your attention; speaking of it throughout more as a matter for the individual Christian life, than as belonging to the whole Church. I would beg of each of you to enter into his soul's chamber and shut his doors about him, while we enquire what this pastoral office of Christ is; what it requires us to believe in the depths of our hearts respecting Him; what encouragements it holds forth to us; what

consolation it pours on our spirits when they are perplexed, or wounded, or fainting within us.

The thought of Christ as the Shepherd of our souls touches us in many points. The first seems to be, our need of one superior to ourselves to rely upon. This feeling of reliance is almost a necessity to us. We are not happy as our own masters. We cannot face the dark future, we cannot meet the difficulties of the tangled present, we cannot contemplate the sins and errors and shortcomings of the terrible past, all alone. The soul yearns and seeks about for one to stand between it and danger, between it and uncertainty, between it and guilt. And herein lies the account of men

giving their consciences to others to keep, and accepting difficult beliefs without question, and setting up over themselves a guide esteemed infallible,—that they cannot bear to be entrusted with the keeping of themselves ; anxiety, restlessness, morbid scruples, mental prostration, are the consequences of their having to fulfil unaided so solemn a responsibility. Now Christ, by declaring Himself the Good Shepherd, by distinguishing Himself from all other shepherds, assumes, and warrants us in asserting of Him, the Headship over and the superiority to His whole flock, and every soul in it. And when I thus think of Him, it is as that superior being on whom, as regards His own character and position,

I can unreservedly lean. He is, by the very terms of this designation of Himself, not one of my fellow-creatures, but one above me and above all of us, my Lord and my God. Any men, any body of men, any ordinance of man, is limited, is fallible: will not cover the extent of my need of reliance, will not by enactment, or by any other kind of foresight, have provided for my ten thousand individual wants and difficulties. But this great Shepherd, who is over all His flock, and over me, lies under no such disadvantage. I need not fear any fallibility, or any lack of power, when I look up to Him, when I trust Him, when I rely on His all-knowledge and all-mightiness. For it is impossible that He should have used

this language with psalm and prophecy before Him, and intended it to imply less than His Divinity. He was speaking among those who were familiar with such addresses as, "Thou that dwellest between the cherubim, Thou that leadest Joseph like a sheep:" with such words as "Jehovah is my Shepherd: I shall not want:" those who had not forgotten the chapter of Ezekiel above referred to, where the God of Israel draws the same distinction between Himself and the false shepherds; who had in their minds the direct prophecy of Isaiah, "Behold the Lord God cometh, and His reward is with Him: He shall feed His flock like a shepherd." He could not have thus spoken, without having in view the whole

course of accomplished redemption : when He described His exercising of this His pastoral office, He looked not on Himself as a Teacher with His disciples, leading them in circuits round Galilee, but as exalted by God's right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour : as having all power given to Him in heaven and in earth. So that, and this is surely a weighty point in our soul's regarding of the matter, we begin with the assurance that in all that requires power, wisdom, goodness, our Shepherd, He on whom we are to rely and cast our being and our hopes, is not limited but infinite ; not man but God. Less than this will not suffice, if the reliance is to be entire and unbroken. Even when, in this matter of

the soul's welfare, man casts himself on man, or on a body of men, or on a human ordinance or polity, there is always divine presence, authorization, or guidance, supplied in the background, so that the ultimate stay is not man but God.

Now it might be supposed, that the soul having such a Shepherd as this, infinite in power, wisdom, and goodness, would desire no more ; would also on its part be perfect and unbroken in its reliance. And if our inward feelings followed the law of our reason,—if the man, compounded of various affections and sympathies, answered always to the helm of his convictions, this might be so. But as it is, our convictions dwell as it were in one part of us, and our feelings and

affections are evoked in another. We are fragmentary and inconsequent. The steersman may turn the helm according to rule, but the course of the ship is erratic. The Shepherd may be almighty, but the sheep do not obey Him ; all-wise, but they do not believe Him ; all-good, but they do not trust Him. The region of conviction must be connected with the region of sympathy. The sterner material of the one needs knitting on and combining with the tender and delicate fabric of the other. If I am to cast myself on this my Shepherd, I must have more data respecting Him, than that He is Lord and God. The more worthily I conceive of Him as being this, the less shall I feel warranted in the casting my-

self upon Him in full, constant, familiar reliance. On the one hand will expand the majesty and symmetry of His perfections : on the other will dwindle into insignificance, or only assert its presence by its unworthiness and incongruity, my own contemptible littleness, waywardness, selfishness. Shall such an one as He ever reach out His crook to reclaim such an one as me ? Can my loathsome wounds ever be touched or bound up by His pure and heavenly hand ? And if not, where is my soul's reliance ? where is the comfort I want, where the guidance ?

So that our weak and suffering humanity wants more than the conviction that Jehovah is our Shepherd. More is needed by the entire requirements

of the very similitude itself. What were the shepherd, infinitely removed from the sheep? Some great owner of flocks, reigning elsewhere in unapproachable majesty? How could He thus be a shepherd at all? They look for Him in their midst, reclining with them in their green pastures, buffeting with the storm that blinds them, caring daily and nightly for their safety; their danger must be His danger, their lot His lot. In one sense, as they are, so must He be: of the same suffering flesh, of the same feeling heart. Conviction of His existence is not enough: even sight of Him is not enough: reliance needs touch for its assurance; He must lay hold of them, not merely by what He is, but

also by what they are. And here is the mystery of your inner being and of mine, which the Incarnation and the Resurrection of the Son of God have solved for us : solved, it is true, by a greater mystery ; but raised us to the height of that greater mystery by solving. Before it was solved the two lay over against one another,—Jehovah in His perfection, the soul in her weakness, and unworthiness, and sorrows. How is one to touch the other ? Rather, how is the weaker ever to regard the stronger without shrinking and terror ? But what if the divine Shepherd have been Himself a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief ? What, if having Himself been tempted, He know how to succour them

that are tempted? If He looks upon the dark passages of trial and the perilous footsteps of doubt and difficulty, not from the infinite height of divine Omniscience, but from the depths of His own humiliation, His own dejection, His own agony? Will not God thus (strange to say) have gained by becoming man that knowledge of personal experience which is the most powerful source of sympathy? What encouragement would thus be given to every fainting, every doubting, every unworthy and sinful soul in the flock to pour out its griefs to the Shepherd, to reach out the wounded limb, and lay open the unwelcome sore, for Him to bind up and to solace!

And even so it is, my brethren. This

further requisite than even divine perfection itself: this asking of the flock for one to rely on who shares their weaknesses, hath our Shepherd, in the greatness of His love, provided for. He is one of ourselves. All that man feels as man, He hath felt likewise. The avenues of temptation which were open in Adam, were open in Him. All the sinking of the burdened spirit, all the shrinking from pain and suffering, all the struggle of the human will against the superior resolve of resigned obedience, He has undergone in His own person. So that when these, or the like of these, are laid open to Him, He receives them. He treats them, not only as God looking down on His creatures with pity, but as

man, yearning for them with sympathy. Nor have His triumph and His passage through the tomb endangered this partnership, or quenched these sympathies; nay, it is by virtue of this very victory that He has put them on in their completeness. On that glorious Easter morning, when He had but now assumed the majesty of His resurrection-triumph, and from the yonder bank of the river of death, bright with immortal day and unfading flowers, looked back on those who had fled from Him in His hour of trial, it was in no words of estrangement or repudiation that He clothed His message: "Go to my brethren, and say unto them, that I ascend to my Father and to your Father, to my God and

your God." He is still our Brother ; His Father, still our Father ; His God, still our God.

But even to this requisite one more particular is needful. What warrant have I for knowing that the sympathy of this Good Shepherd extends to *me*,—extends, that is, to all His flock of mankind ? His own griefs He has borne, His own trials He has passed through, His own temptations He has overcome ; but how does this ensure that He can feel those of all our race ? He, as man, was without sin ; how do I know that He embraces in His sympathy those who are carnal, sold under sin ? The comparatively upright and pure, these may have a right to come and claim His compassion for

their failings ; or His heart may be larger than this, and having come to seek and to save the lost, He may receive many unworthy, many that are impure : but how am I to be sure that He receives all ? And, if one of all mankind be excluded, where is our claim to be His, and to rely on Him ? for may not that excluded one be *myself* ? Such a matter as the soul's reliance must not be imperilled on the uncertainty of an inference, nor left to be accepted or rejected on the mere surmise of a greater or less degree of sympathy and love. We are very weak and very wayward in this matter of inward trust, and no points will bear being left unassured. The reason may have pro-

nounced all impregnable, but the heart may still tremble with fatal misgiving. That the Shepherd receives the guilty and unworthy, may be held for a truth, may be maintained against impugners, may be proclaimed to others in their doubt, while the very holder himself lays not the truth to his own soul,—has his own faithless escape from it. “The guilty and the unworthy? Doubtless ; yet not such as I am.”

And here, brethren, comes in the importance of apprehending rightly the great doctrine of the Lord's incarnation, in all those particulars in which the creeds of the Church have set it forth and asserted it. It is the fashion of our day to use much rhetoric and much

pathos respecting the love and gentleness of our Blessed Lord, and to give but a vague and hazy account of the great doctrines on which rest our share in His sympathy, and our claim to all that He has done. Never was there a time when these doctrines more required distinct statement, and substantiating by Scripture, by evidence, by the reason of the case. It has become our duty to reassert the objective reality of the covenant which God has made with man in Christ ; to secure once more the anchorage-ground for men's souls and hopes ; to re-edify, if it may be, that temple which foes are combining to attack and feeble friends not scrupling to betray. I know that the Lord Jesus is not only the good

Shepherd, but that He is *my* Shepherd, not only that there are some who may cast themselves upon Him, but that I may cast myself upon Him:—I know this, because He took the manhood, our whole nature, into Himself, into God. Had He as God been pleased to dwell in the person of an individual man, and thus to be tempted and suffer and triumph,—had such a thing as this been conceivable, then would the righteousness which He wrought out, and the merit of His sacrifice in death, and the triumph which he achieved over death, have belonged to Himself alone. Every man's personal being is insulated from that of every other man; and neither the responsibilities, nor the trials, nor

the victories, of one man in his own person can be transferred as personal perfections to another. But the Son of God did not this. He, remaining one and the same divine Person, took into that Divinity of His, not a distinct human personality, but the human nature, thus becoming its righteous Head, and the seed of righteousness and life and love in the whole of our manhood. So that when He obeyed, when He was smitten for sin, when He overcame death, it was not for Himself, it was not for us as a personal human substitute: His humanity was not limited, but included all of us: His obedience is ours, His satisfaction for sin is our redemption, His victory over death is

life and immortality to us : so that “as in Adam all die, even so,” in the same inclusive manner, “in Christ shall all be made alive.” And if I ask now what warrant have I for looking upon Christ as my Shepherd — what warrant for knowing that His divine power, that His human sympathies, are mine? the question is answered, the doubt is set at rest, with the reception of the true doctrine of the Lord’s incarnation and the Lord’s resurrection in our humanity. God made of one blood all nations on the earth. That one blood flowed in the veins of the Son of God : that one blood was shed for sin on the cross : that one blood beat with our pulses, throbbed with our anguish, is His and ours in its

oneness. Therefore in Christ there is neither Jew nor Greek, neither bond nor free, neither male nor female, but in Him all are one. Here then is my warrant for knowing that all that temptation, all that suffering, all that purchasing of peace by His sacrifice, and sealing it by His triumph, extends to me, extends to every one who, with the poison of sin tainting him, shall turn and look on the Son of God. And O my brethren, what strong consolation again is here! My warrant for committing myself to this good Shepherd is not the degree of my apprehension of His power, or of His love, or of His sympathy; is nothing that I have gone through, nothing that I have attained unto, nothing that, un-

less I reject Him against myself, I can lose : it is not an individual conformity, but it is the taking up of a covenant right, the entering into and becoming possessed of a purchased inheritance.

And, being all this to us, to every one of us, being Jehovah our Shepherd, being man as we are, having taken into Himself, and bearing upon Him, our whole humanity, He acquired us as His flock, He purchased every one of us with the price of His own blood ; He shed it, not as a mere example of love, but to bring us out of ruin and guilt into the favour of God and a standing in His accepted righteousness. Here again is a doctrine which it is in our day the fashion to speak of, if at all, vaguely and

obscurely: to cover up with flowers of rhetoric, so that it may or may not be recognized beneath them. Christ's Death is in our time much treated and well, but far too often timidly, in a half satisfied and shrinking manner. But, my brethren, unless His death were this sacrifice, unless the Good Shepherd thus laid down His life on behalf of the sheep, unless His resurrection testified to our acceptance, I submit to you that this Christianity of ours is a delusion; we are not His flock, nor the sheep of His pasture. It is by His Death that He has purchased us, by His Resurrection that the purchase is declared complete and the Surety released; it is by bringing again from the dead the great

Shepherd of the sheep, that God hath become to us the God of peace.

I have spoken to-day entirely of that which our Shepherd is to each of us in His own person : of what He is, rather than of that which He does, in His pastoral office : of what we are to believe of Him, rather than of that which we are to seek in Him. The wants and weakness of our various characters, and how they may be supplied and strengthened by the having Him for our Shepherd,—this, the larger and more varied portion of our subject, yet remains.

May God prepare us for the fitting consideration of it, by impressing on us, and carrying into our hearts, that which we have already heard.

III.

Third Sunday after Easter.

THE SHEPHERD AND HIS SHEEP.

“ My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me : and I give unto them eternal life ; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand.” —JOHN x. 27, 28.

WE considered last Sunday the pastoral office of our risen Lord, treating it mainly with reference to the individual Christian life. And we had advanced thus far. Premising that yearn-

ing for reliance, guidance, sympathy, which is natural to all of us, we saw that our Shepherd is one on whom our souls may unreservedly lean, for He has all power, and wisdom, and goodness, being by the very terms of His declaration of Himself as the Good Shepherd, our Lord and God. We saw too, that He is one not infinitely removed from us, but between whom and ourselves subsist the tender sympathies of our common humanity, being Himself man. And we insisted, as a result of the true doctrine of His incarnation, that He is not confined in these sympathies, or in the work that He has wrought for us, to the limits of His own personal being, for He took not the person of a man, but our whole man-

hood, into His personal Godhead, so that we all have a claim and a share in Him. And lastly, we saw that His possession of us as His flock is not of mere antecedent right, in that He hath made us, but one of right resulting from a definite act of His, by which He hath purchased us out of the possession of another into His own : viz., His Death for our redemption.

So far we seem to have been laying the foundations and setting out the great constituent truths, of this His office, and of our standing as the sheep of His pasture. We shall to-day be employed in following out some of the practical results of these truths, and in raising the building of our personal lives on those foundations.

A preliminary remark is needed on a very common defect in our thoughts of our Blessed Lord : I mean, the confining them too much to the past and the future, to the neglect of what is present. What He was, and said, and did, in His manifestation upon earth, cannot be too much studied by us, for on this depends all we know of Him, and on this our trust is grounded. What He will be in His future coming and our gathering together to Him, and completion in Him, should be ever kept in our view, for it is the substance of our hopes, the fruit of our labours, the consolation of our disappointments and sorrows. But both these, the thought of Him in the past, and the thought of Him in the future, only then

become real powers influencing our hearts and lives, when they are bound together, and animated, by regard to Him as He is in the present. If this be, as so often it is, omitted, our knowledge of Him is confined to the region of speculation, and does not spread into that of action. What He is to us now, where He is now, what He is at this moment doing, what we ought to be doing and feeling towards Him, in the present, and as present, these are the really profitable inquiries for the Christian man, and without these in some measure subsisting, we cannot be, in any worthy sense, His disciples. Happy is he, whose current conception of the world and all that is therein, is never without Him in whom the universe is gathered together,

and by whom all things consist ; he in whose inward world of passing ideas and images shaped by thought, sits ever supreme that human glorified Form, which in some blessed place even now shares the throne of the Father. For that man best enters into, that man only in truth makes real to himself, the fact on which we would dwell first to-day, that this good Shepherd is ever present with His flock, and with every member of it. "Lo I am with you alway, all the days, even until the consummation of the world." The particular *method* of this presence should, of course, come into consideration in its place : but meantime we all should be infinite gainers in our inward lives by accepting the saying in its simplicity as He uttered it ;

that, be the manner and method what it may, He, He Himself, is ever present : the Shepherd. always with His flock. "Where two or three are gathered in His name, there is He in the midst of them." When we seek our solitude, we escape not from Him ; when we walk by the way, He is our companion ; ever standing by, ever looking into our face with His, approvingly, reproachingly, as we in thought, in word, in deed, confess Him or deny Him. But more, far more. He is not a mute inactive witness, as He stands by us, as He walks with us ; He is our ever present Shepherd : tending us, feeding us, reclaiming us ; not there to be ministered unto, but to minister. Blessed are they who hourly

look for His ministrations : blessed, who in the haunts of men, and in the secret chamber, listen for His gentle whisper, rise up and sit down at His reminding touch, feed upon Him by faith in His abiding Sacrifice, go out and come in with Him to lead them.

And thus we pass to our main subject : the acts of the Good Shepherd in His present dealing with the individual soul ; and the attitude of the soul towards her Shepherd. These are summed up for us by Himself in my text, but have been given now in detail in the discourse of which these words form the close.

The most comprehensive of these His acts is, *guiding*. “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow

me." They hear His voice. But what has that voice uttered? How has it addressed them? "He calleth His sheep by name." "By name." The name of each one of us is, when we come to think of it, a strange and mysterious thing. One of those words which we hear the oftenest, but which carries us into the depth of our personality. By its utterance, we grasp the very person himself. "Jesus stood and said, Mary. She answered to Him, Rabboni." If with any of you, in the midst of carelessness or dissipation, of the pouring forth of unhallowed words, or the revelling in forbidden thoughts, a soft voice from the home fireside were to whisper the accustomed name, how would sin start up as

at the touch of the spear-point; how would the gentle waters of affection return and murmur again over their bed which the waster had scorched! And we further characterize that which is our closest and most personal name,—we call it our *Christian* name. Its sound tells us that we are His, brings with it the covenant in which we stand with Him: lets us not forget, that we are sheep of His pasture. Observe how this individualizes His regard for His flock: how again it puts each of us into a relation with Him of intimate knowledge, and as it were daily and hourly love. He calls us, as a mother calls her child: as a man calls his friend. He has a voice which cannot be mistaken by any one of

us : a voice whose sound tells of our own character and of our own wants : a tone of love stirring our love in return.

And what says this voice to every one of us, my brethren ? When we hear our own name pronounced, when we cannot but turn and look, when the attitude of our souls is, "Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth," what command has He for each of us ? Simply this, "Follow Me." "He goeth before, and the sheep follow Him, for they know His voice." Very various are our paths in life ; but in front of every one of His sheep is the Shepherd, leading the way. Is our life active business, unremitting study, self-denying obedience ? He goeth before.

Thirty unobserved years were spent by Him in diligent subjection to ordinary duties. Follow Him. Is it patient suffering? Behold Him on the road, bowing under His cross. Is it to bear neglect and scorn; to endure being undervalued and set aside? See, where the proud and self-asserting are thronging thickest, a tender plant springing up, crushed and trodden by their feet: that is He; be thou content to be as He was. Is thy lot, to wait patiently the hour of dismissal,—earth receding and fading away,—eternity closer and larger each hour? Look up, and thou shalt still see the well-known Form passing into the dark valley before thee. The same words, “Follow Me,” have ten thousand

varying tones, according as they are spoken to the varieties of human character and calling. The sheep follow Him ; for they know His voice.

And this going before them is not for encouragement only ; it is also for guidance : for pointing out to us, and conducting us to, the green pastures and the waters of comfort : for teaching us what to seek and what to avoid. But we need wisdom, and trust, and patience, to discriminate, and to lean upon, and to wait for, this guidance of our Shepherd. For though it is ever present, we do not always perceive it : though it is unerring, we do not always trust it : though it is never delayed beyond its time, we are not disposed always to be patient till

it is vouchsafed. "My sheep hear my voice." So they do, in the main, and when they bethink themselves, and when they are faithful to Him, and when they are listening for Him : but very often in our course we forget ourselves, and our ears are inattentive, and we are unfaithful, and listening for any voice rather than His guiding call. And then we mistake the deceiver's voice for His : or He speaks, and we perceive it not, and rise not up to follow. His guidance again may not come exactly when, nor exactly as, we expect it. In our weakness, we may then feel most bewildered, when we are going safest and surest. It is not always a straight nor an easy path along which our Shepherd leads

us. Our feet may be cut by the rocks, our limbs may be torn by the brambles : His were, who goes before us : and why should we think it strange ? But we do think it strange : and often, when closest to His guiding hand, if we become weary, or if obstacles meet us, or if the path take unexpected turns, we fancy ourselves abandoned, and His guidance withdrawn. And there are errors the other way also. Many an one of Christ's flock has believed himself to be under His special guidance, when he was not so : has gone out of the way, and fallen into mischief, for want of better discerning the signs of the Shepherd's presence.

Nor again does He always guide us *as* we expected. We lay down rules

for His action: but His ways are not our ways. We expect Him ever to be seen in the direction where we are looking, to be heard in the quarter to which our ear is directed. But where would be our growth and ripening in wisdom, if we were never left to learn the way for ourselves? There are circumstances, where no apparent guidance is the very best guidance. And He knows when these occur, and guides us, but not as we expect. And thus His voice oftentimes speaks under disguise, and we are in danger of missing it. When we stray from Him and He would guide us back, He does not always meet us in His own person, nor speak in His own tone. There is for us no special

recognition of Him : no “Domine quo vadis” encountering of Him. Some casual sound penetrated thy soul and raised questioning : some wayside sight recalled thy better thoughts : some faithful word of a friend, or some malicious word of a foe, made thee for a moment to stand and ponder : some pictured incident, or some book in a street window, threw a flitting line of change across thy thoughts : it was the Lord : it was thy Shepherd guiding thee, not as thou lookedst for Him, but none the less certainly, none the less safely. Blessed are they who, in life’s difficulties and life’s temptations, are patient to listen for His guidance, wise to discern His voice ; who have the energy to arise when He

calls, and the endurance to follow whithersoever He goeth.

Again; this going before His sheep is not only for example, not only for guidance, but also for *defence*. Our Shepherd is our Captain. He guides us into our promised pastures: but He goes before us armed. The perils of the wilderness pastures were in His mind when He said of His sheep, "They shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of mine hand." Whatever dangers, whatever enemies beset each of us, He is sufficient for all. Day by day He is fighting for us. We know not how often His arm protects us. We attribute to our own strength deliverances which He alone has wrought. All

our weak points are open to Him : at each of them He sets His watch, though we may relax our vigilance : and He takes care to remind us of them, though in our self-confidence we may forget them.

But here again let us take good heed, that we understand well *against what enemies* He defends us. It is part of our weakness, to mistake friends for foes, and foes for friends. Only the unerring eye of our Shepherd can discern the one from the other. Our sight is perverted by self-interest and earthly passions. We think it hard that we are not allowed to embrace the very weapons of the enemy, and we fret and chafe at the faithful words of our best friends. Against tribulations,

against crosses, against bereavements, thy Shepherd and Captain will not defend thee. For these are not thine enemies : these are his messengers : the drawings of His crook, and the admonitions of His rod. It will be often against prosperity, against ease and comfort, against self-reliance, against thine own good opinion, against the praise and honour that come from men, that thy Shepherd will rise up and defend thee. When all seems smoothest, when thou hast achieved thy success, when thou hast entered into thy Paradise, and walkest up and down in thy Babylon, then shall come a blow, whence thou least expected it, from a hand unrevealed to thee. Be not terrified : it was not dealt on thee, but for thee ; not by one coming

against thee, but by one who fights by thy side. The crash that carried thee to the ground with it, was not thy ruin, but the enemy's : was the shivering of the sword which was lifted against thee, the snapping of the chain which the foe was casting round thee. Look up—the sky is clear, and thou art free. We load ourselves with things which are not for our good, and gird on us unproved armour and fancy that our bane is our treasure : but He knows what is the real immortal gem within us,—how much of us is His, and will endure unto the end : and that it is which He preserves, and fences about, and keeps as the apple of His eye. All else in his sight is cumbrous and superfluous : and therefore, in his defence of us, He

strips us down to our real selves: pulls off all the untried armour, all the tinsel which we have fastened on: leaves us alone, yet not alone,—for He is with us, and under us are His everlasting arms.

And on the other hand, who shall deny, that there are times when there can be no mistaking the enemy,—when the battle rages fiercely,—when we and our soul's adversaries are standing foot to foot, and our strength fails, because the foe is too much for us? Times when not temper only but faith itself is tried! when not our comfort, but our life is in danger: not our good report, but His holy name is imperilled? Here again, let us not be mistaken. If He permits such assaults, it is not because He has aban-

doned our defence, but because He knows best how to conduct it. If He is a Captain, He must have soldiers. By these passages of arms, He is training us, He is proving our part in Him, He is preparing us for triumph and honour. He knows how much we can bear, and when to lift His arm in our behalf.

Then again, besides guiding, besides defending, He *governs* His flock. He is our Master whom we serve ; our King whom we obey. In the heart of each one of His flock is the inquiry ever being made, "What saith my Lord?" And in this matter of seeking out and doing His will, we are perhaps in more danger of carelessness and forgetfulness at a time, and in a land, where His words have become

the rules and maxims of Christian public opinion, than we should have been, where those words were as yet scorned and laughed at. When His voice rang loud and clear in men's consciences as a testimony against prevalent moral abominations, the appeal to His laws as King of His people was more direct and obvious than it is now. Are we to some extent living in purity and peace? We are in danger of ascribing it to mere human progress, and leaving Him out. And thus we become careless about obeying Him in cases where the world still knows Him not,—cases where He has commanded things with which it has no sympathy, or forbidden what it still practises. We, who are the sheep of His pasture, should remember,

that all human progress is measured simply by how best men obey Him : morality advances, in proportion as His pure words are observed : science advances, in proportion as men search after God aright, in proportion as they are patient and diligent, and fearless and true, after the example and command of Him who is Truth itself. We shall then be in the central line of true human progress, when we are found in the way of His commandments.

There is one remaining particular in the Good Shepherd's declaration of Himself, and dealing with His flock, coming closer perhaps to the individual heart than any yet considered. "I know them." Not one of them escapes His notice or

His remembrance. Not only does He know them in the sense of the words, "the Lord knoweth them that are His," but their whole being in all its depths lies open to Him. "I know my sheep and am known of mine, even as the Father knoweth me and I am known of the Father." It is ever a drawback to our trust and reliance in any fellow-creature, that we are not and cannot be thoroughly known. However close the accord, however warm the sympathy, still in some measure the heart is a fountain closed, a garden sealed. And all through our wider intercourse with mankind prevails the fear of being misunderstood; of having wrong motives ascribed to us; of our disinterestedness

being read as intrigue, kindness as self-seeking, clear conscience as hypocrisy. But in our inward dealings with our Shepherd, we have the strong consolation that all such apprehension is absolutely precluded. It is a charm, and if I may so say, a luxury of the intercourse of the soul with Him, that while of its weaknesses and sins none can be held back or concealed, all its truth, and love, and tenderness, and generous emotions may be taken for granted, and, though humbly, yet boldly asserted. "Lord, Thou knowest all things: Thou knowest that I love Thee." And it adds to this entireness of confidence, when we reflect that He who now thus knows us, shall one day in the fulness of this knowledge,

judge us ; that He who has guided and defended and ruled us, shall also appor- tion our final doom. For thus our trust is one and unbroken throughout time and eternity : is unbounded as His power, unlimited as His knowledge, uncon- strained as His love.

Compare for one moment, for I know not how better to conclude our medita- tions on our Good Shepherd, the recent language of one who was formerly among ourselves, but now from other and less pure pastures vainly calls to us to join him.* Maintaining, strange to say, that man's confidence in the Mother of our Lord may be greater and more unre- served than that reposed on our Lord

* Newman, Letter to Dr. Pusey on his "Eirenicon."

Himself, "We look to her," he writes, "without any fear, any remorse, any consciousness that she is able to read us, judge us, punish us."

O vain and limited confidence! O treacherous and unworthy reliance! O rash and suicidal confession! For does not every word here supply its own refutation in the fulness and blessedness of our trust in our Divine Shepherd, and in none beside Him?

We look to Him, it is true, with fear: but with that fear, which should ever temper unreserved reliance; and with fear out of which He hath taken the terror; fear which keeps us mindful that our Shepherd is our God. We look to Him with remorse, it is true: but the

fountain opened on His Cross has turned its knawing bitterness into the wholesome tears of loving penitence: we look to Him with, and because of, consciousness that He is able to read us: that there is no bar between our souls and Him: that His infinite compassion only is the measure of His infinite knowledge. We look to Him the more earnestly, the more lovingly, because we believe that He shall come to be our Judge, He who has led us, and fed us with Himself, and fought for us with His sheltering hand: and finally we look to Him though He is able to punish us, without dread of that His power; for "there is no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus."

IV.

Fourth Sunday after Easter.

EXPEDIENCY OF THE LORD'S REMOVAL.

“It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you.” —
JOHN xvi. 7.

WHILE insisting last Sunday on the importance of accepting as a simple truth the constant presence of the Good Shepherd with His flock, I observed, that the particular method of this presence must of course come into consideration in

its order. And as we are now approaching the Festival of the Ascension, it will not be out of place to inquire into this matter, and so to prepare our minds for rightly celebrating that joyful commemoration.

Our blessed Lord came upon earth, and suffered, and triumphed, that He might prepare to Himself and for His glory a flock whom He was to lead, and defend, and govern. It now appears (for we are fully justified in interpreting His purposes by the light of experience and history) that He intended this His flock to continue many centuries in the state of trial before He should come to take it to Himself. And as regards His immediate disciples whom He left behind

Him, it appears to have been His intention not only that an entire change should take place in their thoughts of Him and of themselves, but that by means of them should be begun a far greater change, to be wrought on the entire mass of mankind; gradual indeed and imperceptible in its progress, but working onward until it embraced all within its operation. And this change was to advance according to the laws of the spirit of man which was to be influenced by it. Not by might, not by power, not by external force of any kind, but, so to speak, taking its chance in the crowd of influences; trusting to persuasion, winning its way by gaining men's hearts; content to be opposed, baffled,

put down, then springing up through the gates of its prison, twining round and concealing the very obstacles which barred its path : still in its main and most successful career, unseen, unboasted of ; then surest to be corrupted when made the vaunt or the rallying-cry of men, then certain to become firm and fresh and vigorous when despised and persecuted and put down. And if in the long course of the ages, this influence needed men for its fellow-workers, and the pulses of human hearts to carry on its great harmonies from generation to generation, they were those of the deeper and quieter kind, of whom the world hears not, or hears but seldom. Just as in the outskirts of the grove in spring the shade

is restless and dazzling, and the odours are scattered, and the songs of the birds come fitfully on the ear, because the winds are lashing the plains ; but in the deep recesses of the forest, the shadows are massed in calm, and the odours lie about us as a dream, and the nightingale's song sounds like the power that hushes the breeze, and the heart communes with nature and is still : even so is it with the trees of the garden where the Lord God walketh. Still and deep are the retreats in man's spirit where He possesses all by His presence. Men vaunt before the world, but He is not in their hearts : men lift the arm in zeal, but the sword of the Lord deals not the stroke : men run to and fro and fret them-

selves, but their wrath worketh not His righteousness. Clamour, and controversy, and excitement, ravel out the web of His seamless garment, ruffle the wings of His sweet messengers of peace, wreck the odours from the fields of heaven on their way to us. Not by rapid and visible courses, not by world-famed and blazoned victories, not mainly by decisions of courts and decrees of councils, have the churches grown in grace, and the flock in knowledge of its Shepherd ; but by centuries of living experience and loving sacrifice, by the blessed testimonies of despised lives and unknown deaths, by the accumulating force of irresistible persuasion, the hollowing of the great rock by the—gentle rain from heaven. The matters

that men boast of, they it is that fall away, that perish, that pass out of mind : the matters that God conceals, they it is that grow onward, that endure, that shall be had in everlasting remembrance.

“It is expedient for you that I go away.” His bodily presence in the flesh was necessary for them, for us. But as long as He was with them in the flesh, man talking with man, it was a dispensation of sense, and not of spirit. Eye reflected eye, mouth spoke to mouth, hand was laid upon hand ; and such inward emotions as the evidence of the senses generates at its highest and best, these were doubtless theirs : but the Lord Himself, the Lord God, He that was

begotten of God from eternity, touched them not, till He was ascended to His Father and their Father, and His God and their God. There was no contact of spirit with spirit : and when you and I kneel in our chambers and call in our thoughts after the turmoil of the day, and the sweet sense of His presence spreads over our souls like balm over the pangs of a wound, and our spirit speaks and His Spirit answers, we have nearer communion with Him than the multitude that thronged Him of old,—nearer than the Twelve who were His friends,—nearer than that one of the Twelve, who lay upon His breast, and whispered to Him. None of the great events of His course and of our redemption drew down

what the lisping prayer of a Christian child can draw down now. The sun hid his face when the cross was lifted on Calvary, and the earth trembled; but the Spirit was not in the darkness—the Comforter came not in the earthquake. The raiment of angels gleamed round about Jerusalem on the resurrection morning, and the Lord looked forth once and again from the hiding-place of His majesty: but the Spirit came not with the Resurrection: the Comforter entered not at the closed doors when He stood in the midst of them. Gradually, as the Lord withdrew, like tint on tint when the glorious sun is departing, came forth the blessed influence: then hearts began to burn as He talked by the way, and

understandings opened and took in the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the preliminary earnest and symbol of the Spirit was breathed on them in a stream of life by His breath. Would we know what those forty days wrought? At the beginning of them, because He announced His departure, sorrow filled the disciples' heart: at the end of them, when they had seen the cloud receive Him out of their sight, they returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and were in the temple, blessing and praising God. What new seeds of knowledge, what fresh springs of love, what forgetfulness of themselves, what concentration of thought and feeling upon Him, must have supervened!

And on another account it was best that He should be withdrawn. By human agency, visible and palpable, it was the will of the Lord to spread the knowledge of Himself and the faith over the world ; by the feebleness of human energy, by the foolishness of human preaching. Not the voice that stilled the waves, not the voice that called Lazarus out of his tomb, not the voice whose confession of Himself struck the adversaries to the ground, was to wrangle with the contradictors in the synagogues, and argue down the blasphemers in the market-places ; but those faltering voices that cried " Save Lord, we perish ;" that voice of one who thrice called out " I know not the man : " the

voice of another, whose bodily presence was weak and his speech contemptible : not a preacher of whom it should be said, "Never man spake like this man," but one of whom men should question, "What will this babbler say?" And, my brethren, we may carry on this thought yet further. The religion which was first grounded on things seen and heard, the religion whose early struggles were helped by vision and voice divine, must yet, for its progress and the perfection of its work, be thoroughly weaned from things seen and heard : must learn to look for no vision, to listen for no oracle from above. If Spirit is to speak to spirit, if God is to dwell with man, then it must be no still lingering sign from the glori-

fied Person of the Redeemer, which must either summon, or retain, or encourage, or perfect, the sheep of His flock : no apparition of Himself, no manifest token of His will, must stand between our spirit and His Spirit : He will not have us superstitious, He will not have us decoyed by sense, He will not have our thoughts intent on His accidents, but on His substance. And therefore as years went on, and the faith in Him became established, His Spirit left off to work by outward gifts in apostles and holy men ; He called in His provisional forces, and set up His assured and final reign in the hearts of mankind. It was no longer the shadow of Peter passing by, but the stirring up by Peter of the pure minds by way of remem-

brance ; no longer handkerchiefs from the body of Paul, but his beseeching by the meekness and gentleness of Christ.

And thus it was expedient for us that He should entirely go away : that not only He himself should be withdrawn, but also those who had seen Him, and those that wrought miracles in His name : expedient, that the Church which had known Christ after the flesh, should know Him so no longer : that every tint of that glory, which rose over the pastures of Bethlehem, should fade away behind the brow of the Mount of Olives : that the Lord, and His glittering retinue, should pass into the cloud, and be received out of our sight, —and the disciples of the Lord through

all the ages should walk not by sense but by faith.

And if it was thus expedient that He should be removed away, and that the work He did among us should be left so to speak in charge of another, another to strengthen and teach and console us, let us not lose the lesson which this would teach us, nor be slow to perceive its bearing on the time in which our lot is cast. He is gone from us, and with Him the whole class of influences are gone which He exerted when present and as present, and have given place to others. The eternal verities which He uttered and lived, these indeed have not departed, these can never depart: once sown on earth, they grow, they spread,

and the nations take shelter in their branches ; but they are described for us, they are not spoken to us. We have lost from them the sweet tone of His voice, the loving light of His eye, the winning charm of His present example. All that purely personal trust is gone, which asserted itself when Peter vaunted, and betrayed itself when Peter denied. We have passed, as we said, into a region of higher trust, and of closer contact. Let us then at least be consistent. Let us not show ourselves unworthy of our preferment by despising it ; by hankering after the lower state of sensuous evidence and manifestation.

Hitherto, of what we have lost : and now let us bestow some further words

on it, but as compared with that which we have gained. "If I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you." The eye and the ear and the touch and the taste—through these the Comforter comes not : these may be His aids when present, but they are not His avenues of approach ; even though the Lord Himself were their object. So then, this price we have paid for whatever privilege has been won for us : the withdrawal of the Lord : ages upon ages, and no sign of His personal presence ; "No more talk with God or angel guest : " silence, and the dreary round of common things, and the world buying and selling about us, and hope deferred, and the scoff of the unbeliever, "Where is the promise of His coming ?"

But He also said, "If I go away, I will send Him unto you." In the midst of all this apparent discouragement, the still small voice : no age without it, no age utterly disregarded of it : men's spirits irresistibly softened by its pleading whispers : the change of our human into His divine gradually carried on, even unto the end. And of all this, the Lord's withdrawal from among us is the necessary condition.

Let us illustrate this in some of the chief departments of the work of the Comforter. And first, as to His teaching office. We are apt to think that no teaching could ever equal that of our Blessed Lord in His own person. To have seen that mild and

gracious countenance: to have hung upon those lips, while the voice sweeter than honey distilled the clearness of truth: to have remembered being on that mount and hearing those beatitudes; to have possessed, not their beauty and purity only, but, as a crowning charm, the loving majesty of their first utterance: to have had that tale of the prodigal carried down deep into the heart by all the tenderest tones of Him who came to seek and to save that which was lost: what teaching could be like this? And yet let us remember that whatever the Lord's present teaching may have been in itself, it was in its effect as teaching necessarily compounded of the power of the speaker and the infirmities of the

hearer. "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear." After all, if we had heard it, it might not have been what we expected, nor what would exactly have touched our spirits. Our weakness, our caprice, would have marred its effect. "Is this the great Teacher of mankind? this, He who leads about multitudes after Him?" And as matter of fact, it was so. Men were offended at Him, and rejected His teaching. And here also, He withdrew Himself from them by degrees. Having begun with open speaking, He retired behind the veil of the parable, and conveyed holy truth in the familiar words of household life. And after all, even if received, even if delighted in, His outward teaching could be only, so to speak,

the material, on which inward ponderings and questionings and self-searchings, among which the Spirit is busy, were to be wrought. We have the same material, laid up for us in the storehouse of the written word: shall we murmur, if we possess it freed from the admixture of the lower and less trustworthy influence of our capricious senses? The Comforter, acting through our thoughts and affections, takes of these things of Christ, and shows them to us: opening within us the living wells of yearning and sympathy, kindling light where we were dark: teaching, as no present outward voice, not even God's own voice dwelling in our flesh, could possibly teach us.

Then again as to the Comforter's office of guidance. What guidance, we may be disposed to think, could have been like His, who could not err, nor lead His flock astray? O that I might have clung to the hem of His garment, might have gone away into the mountain which He appointed—might have followed His glorified Form about the world, visited with the favour of His chosen ones! But after all, such guidance could be but the leading of sense. His glorified form partakes of the qualities and accidents of human form in general. It was thus that He proved His identity to His disciples; "Behold me and handle me, that it is I myself." It is thus that the Church lays down

the doctrine respecting His corporeal presence: "It is against the truth of Christ's natural body to be at one time in more places than one." Such leading then would not suffice for all at all times. Besides, no guidance from without can do the Comforter's work. Watch but a Christian man betrayed into hard words and violent acts in headstrong passion. Approach such an one: try to lead him, try to dissuade him. All outward pleading but adds fuel, and serves further to envenom and irritate. But leave him to commune with his thoughts—in other words, let the inward guidings of the blessed Comforter have space to whisper within him, and you shall see sober-mindedness and gentleness return, and

shall hear the wholesome words of regret and penitence.

But here, as ever in dealing with this subject, care must be taken that in our very maintaining of an inward guidance we be not inconsistent with ourselves. They who hold inward guidance, and wait for it to be made manifest to them, are making inward into outward. If the Lord is to speak sensibly within us, the Lord is not gone away, the Comforter is not come. In all I have before said of the Shepherd calling His sheep by name, in all that I have said of their hearing His word and following Him, there has been no such meaning as this, nay rather the negative of any such meaning, and caution against being mis-

led by it. The more we are under divine guidance, the more we are changed into the divine image, the less notably marked, the less prepossessing, the more natural and spontaneous, will be our following of Christ and our guidance by the Comforter. Saul, blinded by the dazzling glow of the Lord's presence on the hostile errand to Damascus, differed not more from Paul exclaiming, "It is not I, but Christ that liveth in me," than one who waits for visible and sensible manifestation of divine guidance differs from the humble and sober-minded Christian, living his ordinary life and thinking his ordinary thoughts in the light of Christ's love, and under the teaching of the Blessed Comforter.

Then again, the Comforter could not have performed His work of consolation, if Christ had not gone away. For consolation to have place, the need of consolation must be felt. Many a man says, "It is good for us to be here," not knowing what he is saying. While the disciples had the Lord with them, they were disposed to rest in a lower and unworthy kind of contentment, from which they needed to be weaned, and taught their need of higher and more blessed contentment. During the time of His bodily presence among them, their state was of necessity imperfect and undeveloped: their true wants were as yet unknown; their deepest need of a Comforter was as yet unrevealed to

them. There wanted sorrow, and bereavement, and conflict, and disappointment, and persecution, to raise them step by step into the thirst for and appreciation of the consolations of the Comforter. That state of which the poet sings,—

“ A soul by force of sorrows high
Uplifted to the purest sky
Of undisturbed humanity,”—

they had to win for themselves by passing through much tribulation. And the Lord's bodily presence operated as a barrier against and absolutely prevented such elevation, by means of the need of consolation, into the blessedness of consolation. “Can the children of the bridechamber mourn, as long as the bridegroom is with them? But the days will come when the Bride-

groom shall be taken from them, and then shall they mourn in those days."

And we may confirm these views by consideration of the general analogy of God's dealings with us. Every good and every perfect gift is from Him : is in its place and degree, though those may not be the highest, the bestowal of His good Spirit, the Comforter. What is His method in these every-day bestowals, these acquirements and enjoyments common to us all ? Is it not evermore this, that they are rather the after results, than the present effects of impressions made on us through the senses ? It is not in the presence of natural beauty, not when we stand before exquisite works of art, not when we hear

of noble examples of virtue, that the soul lays up her stores of knowledge, and of pleasure, and of high ambition to go and do likewise. The teaching does not come till the sense has ceased to be affected, and the mind returns upon itself in solitude. Its best thoughts and words and resolves accrue to it not in the dust and glare of life, but amidst the silent dews, and under the pure star of evening. God deals with us face to face, and brings us through conflict, and wearies us with active duty, and then His hand is withdrawn, and we sit alone, and His Spirit begins to plead within us. And so doubtless it will be, my brethren, not only with this and that thing in our lives, but with all

our life collected up into one. How many have said that, when death has been expected, all past time appeared gathered up into an instant. Why was this, but because it seemed to have come to an end, and the spirit began to contemplate it at a distance? And will this be less so when it is really at an end? Will it not be then first that the Divine Spirit will pour back light over all its dark places, and meaning into all its unfathomable enigmas? And is it not true here also, that unless the teaching of sense, and the actuality of God's dealings with us, be withdrawn, the Comforter will not come to us—at least in His most intimate fulness and His most glorious power?

The sum of all is, that our Blessed Lord, by His withdrawal from us, has in fact fulfilled the indispensable condition for that to be granted us, to confer which on the sons of men He was born, and lived, and died,—even the indwelling influence of God's Holy Spirit. We are not left alone : we are not forgotten : we are not thought unworthy of privileges which the first ages of the Gospel possessed : but God hath reserved a better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect. We are in the broad path of God's providential dealings with His people : taught, guided, and consoled by that Spirit, of whom our Master told us that, unless He went away, the Comforter would not come unto us.

I have thus endeavoured, my brethren, to use my allotted time in this place in speaking to you, not of matters of present controversy or distracting outward interest, but rather of those that concern the individual Christian life ;—the reality for us of the Lord's resurrection,—the relation to us of the Shepherd of our souls,—the expediency of our present state of widowhood from His glorified presence. It was hardly possible but that my words must have tended to remind you of some matters now at issue. We are not unacquainted in these days with some who deny that there is or ever was a Resurrection : we know something of a view of Christianity which tells only of an example in the past, and acknow-

ledges not a present glorified Saviour and Shepherd of His people: and we too are called upon to listen to men who would bring us back to a sensuous worship and a corporeal presence, in virtual denial of the work of that Comforter, who, unless these be withdrawn, cannot come to us.

May the words which have been spoken mainly in direct exposition of the matters treated, act also as warnings to preserve the unwary from error, and the unstable from being shaken in the faith.

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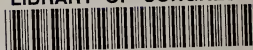
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